

Did the Prophet Say It or Not? The Literal, Historical, and Effective Truth of *Ḥadīths* in Early Sunnism

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INTRODUCTION

Clearly defining the place of prophetic *ḥadīths* in the epistemology of Sunni Islam has proven extremely difficult. On the one hand, Sunni *ḥadīth* scholars and legal theorists elaborated two parallel but contrasting scales for describing their certainty that a *ḥadīth* represented the authentic words or deeds of the Prophet. On the other hand, these Muslim scholars employed *ḥadīths* in a wide range of scholarly discourses and homiletics with seeming disregard for both of these epistemological rankings. The scale developed by legal theorists and adopted into Sunni Islam in the late fourth/tenth and early fifth/eleventh centuries has been well studied.¹ But what about the epistemological scale of the formative Partisans of Hadith (*ahl al-ḥadīth*), the original “Sunni” (*ahl al-sunna wa-l-jamā‘a*) scholars, who preceded this adoption? What did al-Shāfi‘ī (d. 204/820) or Ibn Ḥanbal (d. 241/855) mean when they said that a *ḥadīth* was “sound” (*ṣaḥīḥ*)?² Did they mean that they believed that the Prophet had actually said that statement, or that he probably had, or did they only mean that it was indicative of his normative precedent? When al-Bukhārī (d. 256/870) or al-Tirmidhī (d. 279/892) declared a *ḥadīth* to be sound or “fair” (*ḥasan*), how did those terms reflect their opinion on the historical truth of the *ḥadīth* in question? If a *ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīth* was an authenticated report of the Prophet, how could scholars so regularly state that one *ḥadīth* was “sounder” (*aṣaḥḥ*) than another?³ How do we translate the historical vision of early Muslim scholars into terms that are comprehensible in modern Western thought?⁴

In this article, I contend that *ahl al-ḥadīth* did not view the historical reliability of *ḥadīths* through the epistemological lens of later Sunni legal theorists. Rather, they conceived of sound *ḥadīths* as providing what I will define as historical certainty. Despite their open obsession with the authentication of *ḥadīths* through the *isnād*, they frequently employed *ḥadīths*

1. For comprehensive discussions of this subject, see Aron Zysow, “The Economy of Certainty: An Introduction to the Typology of Muslim Legal Theory” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1984), 14–49; Wael Hallaq, “The Authenticity of Prophetic Ḥadīth: A Pseudo-Problem,” *Studia Islamica* 89 (1999): 75–90. See also Bernard Weiss, *The Search for God’s Law* (Salt Lake City: Univ. of Utah Press, 1992), 259–321; Murteza Bedir, “An Early Response to al-Shāfi‘ī: ‘Īsā b. Abān on the Prophetic Report (*khbar*),” *Islamic Law and Society* 9.3 (2002): 285–311.

2. In this article *ṣaḥīḥ* is translated as “sound” for the pragmatic reason that translating it as “authentic” would make any discussion of authenticity or the authentic beyond this technical usage very difficult. For discussions of the proper translation of *ṣaḥīḥ*, see G. H. A. Juynboll, “Ṣaḥīḥ,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New ed.; Asma Hilali, “Étude sur la tradition prophétique: La question de l’authenticité du I/VIIème au VI/XIIème siècle” (doctoral diss., École Pratique des Hautes Études, 2004), 19.

3. I am indebted to David Powers for this excellent question.

4. For the dangers of assuming uniform notions of what constitutes history across time and locales, see David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), 211–35. I am grateful to the anonymous reviewer for *JAOS* for this reference.

of God” and not vice versa.⁵⁴ In addition, in terms of their scale of transmission, readings of the Qur’an were not always accepted as canonical or authentic because they had met the technical requirements of legal theorists for massive transmission (*ṭawātur*) but simply because they had some *isnād* support and had become widely accepted.⁵⁵

For our purposes, unless it can be proven that Partisan of Ḥadīth scholars in fact treated the detailed wording of Qur’anic verses as inherently more historically reliable than *ṣaḥīḥ ḥadīths*, the declaration of legal theorists of the fifth/eleventh century that the Qur’an is *mutawātir* thus has no bearing on the epistemological worldview of al-Shāfi‘ī or his cohort. Al-Shāfi‘ī distinguishes between the strengths of proof (*ḥujja*) provided by “an explicit text (*naṣṣ bayyin*) from the Book [of God] or an agreed-upon prophetic precedent (*sunna*), which no one could doubt,” on the one hand, and a prophetic precedent “from a report of the Elect about which the report could differ,” on the other.⁵⁶ But, again, the question here is not one of historical reliability but rather of interpretive explicitness and consensus on the meaning of a text on the one hand, and ambiguity and disagreement on the other.

ṢAḤĪḤ, LITERAL TRUTH, AND HISTORICAL TRUTH

The notion of a *ḥadīth* being “sound” (*ṣaḥīḥ*) or “established” (*ṭhabata*) (the two terms are used interchangeably in the third/ninth century) is difficult to define exactly. Neither al-Bukhārī nor Muslim (d. 261/875), the authors of the revered *Ṣaḥīḥayn*, left a description of his requirements for a sound *ḥadīth*. The earliest surviving definition of *ṣaḥīḥ* from someone who authored a *ṣaḥīḥ* collection comes from al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s student, Ibn Khuzayma (d. 311/923), who notes in the introduction to his collection that he only includes *ḥadīths* “that an upstanding (*‘adl*) transmitter narrates from another upstanding transmitter continuously to [the Prophet] without any break in the *isnād* nor any impugning of the reports’ transmitters.”⁵⁷

This dovetails with what the generation of al-Bukhārī’s and Muslim’s teachers had reportedly maintained. When asked to describe what sort of *ḥadīth* can be deemed “established” from the Prophet and be compelling proof (*ḥujja*), the Meccan al-Ḥumaydī (d. 219/834) replies that it must be “solidly established (*ṭhābit*) from the Messenger of God, with

54. *Jā’at al-sunna qāḍiyar^{an} ‘alā l-kitāb wa-laysa al-kitāb qāḍiyar^{an} ‘alā l-sunna*. This quote is attributed to Yaḥyā b. Abī Kathīr and al-Awzā‘ī. See *Sunan al-Dārimī*, introd. chaps., *bāb al-sunna qāḍiya ‘alā kitāb Allāh*; Muḥammad b. Naṣr al-Marwazī, *al-Sunna*, ed. ‘Abdallāh b. Muḥammad al-Baṣīrī (Riyadh: Dār al-‘Āṣima, 1422/2001), 106–7; al-Ḥākim al-Naysābūrī, *Ma‘rifat ‘ulūm al-ḥadīth*, 2nd ed. (Hyderabad: Dā‘irat al-Ma‘ārif al-‘Uthmāniyya, 1385/1966), 82; al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *al-Kifāya*, 1: 81; al-Zarkashī, *al-Baḥr al-muḥīt*, 3: 239.

55. See Intisar Rabb, “Non-Canonical Readings of the Qur’an: Recognition and Authenticity (the Ḥimṣī Reading),” *Journal of Quranic Studies* 8.4 (2006): 105ff.; Aḥmad ‘Alī al-Imām, *Variant Readings of the Qur’an* (Herndon, Va.: International Institute of Islamic Thought, 1998), 121. Ibn Ḥajar al-‘Asqalānī attributes a similar opinion to Abū Shāma al-Maqdisī (d. 665/1267) and al-Baghawī (d. 516/1122): Ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-bārī*, 9: 39. This was pointed out by the later Muslim analyst al-Shawkānī (d. 1834), who stated that the claim of Sunni legal theorists that the Qur’an is entirely *mutawātir* in all its verses across the seven canonical readings is a claim devoid of “even a hint of knowledge, for indeed each one of these readings has been transmitted via *āḥād* means, as anyone who is familiar with the *isnāds* of those [seven] readers for their transmissions [of the Qur’an] knows”: Muḥammad b. ‘Alī al-Shawkānī, *Irshād al-fuḥūl ilā taḥqīq ‘ilm al-uṣūl*, ed. Muḥammad Sa‘īd al-Badrī (Beirut: Mu’assasat al-Kutub al-Thaqāfiyya, 1412/1992), 62–63.

56. al-Shāfi‘ī, *al-Risāla*, 460–61.

57. Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Ishāq b. Khuzayma, *Ṣaḥīḥ Ibn Khuzayma*, ed. Muḥammad Muṣṭafā al-A‘zamī, 5 vols. (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, [1970?], 1: 3.

Islam: A Comprehensive Introduction

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An English Rendering of *Mīzān* by
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CONTENTS

Translator's Note 11

Author's Foreword 15

— Preamble (1) —

Fundamental Principles

1. Principles of Understanding the Qur'ān 19
 - i. Appreciation of Classical Arabic 19
 - ii. Eloquence of Language 25
 - iii. Uniqueness of Style 26
 - iv. The Final Authority 28
 - (1) Variant Readings 31
 - (2) Intentionality of the Text 36
 - (3) Muḥkam and Mutashābih 37
 - (4) Ḥadīth and the Qur'ān 39
 - v. Parallel Verses and Constructions 46
 - vi. The Final Book on Religion 48
 - vii. Subject-Matter of the Qur'ān 51
 - viii. Coherence in the Discourse 53
 - ix. Arrangement of the Qur'ān 56
 - x. Historical Background 59
 2. Principles of Determining the Sunnah 61
 - i. The First Principle 61
 - ii. The Second Principle 62
 - iii. The Third Principle 62
 - iv. The Fourth Principle 63
 - v. The Fifth Principle 63
 - vi. The Sixth Principle 63
 - vii. The Seventh Principle 64
 3. Principles of Understanding the Ḥadīth 64
 - i. Literary Appreciation of the Arabic Language 66
 - ii. Interpretation in the Light of the Qur'ān 67
 - iii. Understanding the Occasion of the Ḥadīth 67
 - iv. Analysis of all the Variant Texts 68
 - v. Reason and Revelation 68
-

Translator's Note

*Islam: A Comprehensive Introduction*¹ is an extensive study of the contents of Islam by Javed Aḥmad Ghāmidī (b. 1951). It is an effort which spans almost two decades of both creative and critical thinking. This attempt to expound the contents of Islam is not a new one. Preceding Ghāmidī is an illustrious series of names who have ventured forth to present Islam the way they have understood it. All these efforts are commendable and merit deep deliberation. A serious student should perhaps conduct a comparative study to gauge the approaches followed by each.

The author is a prominent pupil of Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī (1904-1997), a profound exegete and a distinguished student of the prodigious Qur'ānic scholar: Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī (1863-1930). Ghāmidī draws heavily on the approach and research of his two eminent predecessors. However, he has not only developed and lent precision to their approach and views, he has also made some original contributions in this regard.

The entire effort is a fresh interpretation of Islam from its original sources on the basis of the principles delineated in the first preamble. The reason that it has been undertaken is that interpretation of sacred texts has always remained a human endeavour and thus can never remain fault free. It is as a result of this principle that the author has continued to evaluate and re-evaluate even his own findings. He is of the opinion that no view or interpretation is acceptable if it cannot stand up to criticism. It should not have any value merely because a certain great scholar or authority presented it. Even the greatest of scholars are not immune from error; therefore, it is arguments and reasoning based only on the original sources of Islam that should be the basis for accepting or rejecting a point of view. Thus, just as the author has differed with authorities of the past, he has also differed from his two predecessors whose approach and research are foundational to this work.

Some distinctive features of the author's approach evident from this book are summarized below:

1. The Qur'ān is regarded as the *mīzān* (the scale) and the *furqān* (distinguisher between right and wrong), a status which it itself claims. It is the scale in which everything related to religion must be weighed and the decisive word in every matter of religion. Everything in religion must stand in subservience to its verdicts. It is as a result of this supreme status of the Qur'ān that the author has made the following inferences:

1. The original Urdu title of this translation is *Mizān* (lit. the scale) The current translation is from the 5th edition of *Mizān* published in February 2010. (Translator)

i. There is only one reading of the Qur'ān called the *al-qirā'at al-'āmmah* (the general reading). It is only this reading which has been transmitted through *tawātur* and can thus be called the Qur'ān. All other readings cannot be regarded as the Qur'ān and none of them stands up to the criteria of *tawātur*.

ii. The *muḥkam* and *mutashābih* verses of the Qur'ān are distinct and easily discernable. The latter are verses that mention things which are beyond the grasp of human knowledge and observation or belong to matters of the Hereafter. Such things are mentioned in the form of comparison (*tashbīh*) to things which we are aware of in our own language and through our own experience. The denotation of these verses is clear. However, human intellect is unable to understand the reality to which they refer.

iii. The Qur'ān is a univocal book that conveys its meanings with absolute clarity and there is no ambiguity about them. The intentionality of its text is certain and unmistakable. Its words convey what they stand for with full certainty. Differences in its interpretation have arisen not because there is any defect in its language or style. They have arisen because human beings at times falter in their understanding which may be due to a lack of knowledge or to a lack of deliberation or both.

iv. The Ḥadīth is a historical record of Prophetic teachings. It cannot change or modify the Qur'ān in any way. Its scope is confined to explaining and elucidating religion or in delineating the exemplar of the Prophet (sws). The Qur'ān is not dependent on the Ḥadīth for its explanation; On the contrary, the Ḥadīth need to be interpreted in the light of the Qur'ān.

2. The Sunnah is treated as an independent source of religion. It is distinct from Ḥadīth. Since at times the Ḥadīth also contains a record of the Sunnah, people have erroneously equated the two. The Sunnah refers to that tradition of Prophet Abraham's (sws) religion which the Prophet Muḥammad (sws) instituted among his followers as religion after reviving and reforming it and after making certain additions to it. The Sunnah was transmitted to the *ummah* by its perpetual adherence and thereby carrying the same stamp of authority as the Qur'ān.

3. The *sharī'ah* portion of the book has been entirely cleansed from *fiqh*. It is based purely on the author's understanding of the divine law. Areas of *fiqh* like the application of *sharī'ah* to specific circumstances or judgements in which the *sharī'ah* is silent and *ijtihād* is needed are not touched upon. This is because all these areas belong to human intellect and are prone to change with change in circumstances and to variation because of a variance in intellect.

4. The *sunnatullāh* (dealings and practices of God) have been separated from the *sharī'ah*. These dealings and practices emanate from God Himself and as such must not be undertaken by human beings in any way. In this regard, the most important of these divine practices: worldly punishment of the direct and immediate addressees of messengers of God who deliberately deny the truth is distinctly reflected in the contents of the book. Its specific nature is highlighted so that it is not confused as a directive of the *sharī'ah*.

5. The scheme of the book is based on the categorization of the Qur'ān regarding the contents of Islam. According to the author, the Qur'ān (2:231; 4:113; 63:2)

itself divides the contents of Islam into two categories: *al-Hikmah* and *al-Kitāb*. While the former refers to topics related to the philosophy of religion, the latter to those that relate to divine law (*sharī'ah*). He has further classified these two categories into sub-categories. *al-Hikmah* comprises two sub-categories: faith and ethics and *al-Kitāb* comprises ten sub-categories: The *Sharī'ah* of Worship Rituals, The Social *Sharī'ah*, The Political *Sharī'ah*, The Economic *Sharī'ah*, The *Sharī'ah* of Preaching, The *Sharī'ah* of *Jihād*, The Penal *Sharī'ah*, The Dietary *Sharī'ah*, Islamic Customs and Etiquette, and Oaths and their Atonements.

Consequently, Part I of this book consists of topics related to *al-Hikmah* and Part II consists of topics related to *al-Kitāb*. Two preambles to these two parts "Fundamental Principles" and "The Religion of Islam" introduce the reader to the hermeneutics which have led the author to his interpretation and to the overall framework of Islam respectively.

6. The overall interpretive approach can be termed as text-based. It is primarily the text of the Qur'ān which determines the purport of what constitutes Islam. Each section of a chapter of this book begins with a verse(s) of the Qur'ān which according to the author is the primary and foundational verse of the topic dealt with in that section. Qur'ānic verses cited subsequently in that section are of secondary nature to that topic. Needless to say that discovering the basic verse of a section helps the reader in grasping the primary Qur'ānic guidance on that topic in a precise manner.

Here I would like to express my deep gratitude to my friends and colleagues Asif Iftikhar, Tariq Mahmood Hashmi and Jhangeer Hanif for giving many useful suggestions to improve the language and standard of the translation. I am also greatly indebted to Iftikhar Tabassum for painstakingly tallying the translation with the original and giving valuable suggestions. I am also thankful to my colleague Izhar Ahmad for his hard work on the citations and references of this translation. I am no less indebted to Azeem Ayub for formatting the manuscript time and again and to Moazzam Safdar for supervising the printing process. May the Almighty reward all of them for their efforts.

I must also express my gratitude to my mother, wife and son who have greatly supported me all along in this task.

As a student of the author, I count myself very lucky to be able discuss directly with the author himself many expressions, sentences and concepts which needed clarification and explanation.

All footnote and bibliographic entries as well as text citation standards are in accordance with the fourteenth edition of The Chicago Manual of Style. The only exception is that of enumeration in which I have made slight innovations.²

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2. The headings and sub-headings follow the descending order sequence of 1., i., (1) and (i).

without limiting its meaning or used in contradiction to some logical premise because if there is a such a contradiction, then it is essential that a word be understood to be used figuratively. Undoubtedly, all these premises are accepted because of their speculative nature and what is based on speculation is all the more speculative.²⁵

Thirdly, it has been mentioned in the Qur'ān that some of its verses are *muḥkam* and certain others are *mutashābih*, and the Qur'ān itself has specified about the latter that only God knows their meaning. This strips the Qur'ān of its status of the final judge. If we are not able to distinguish the *muḥkam* from the *mutashābih*, and are also unable to understand what the *mutashābih* mean then how can we determine the purport of the Qur'ān in these verses, and how can we regard it to be the final authority on the basis of this purport on other things?

Fourthly, there are certain Aḥādīth which seemingly alter the meaning of the Qur'ān. Our scholars at some instances call it *naskh* (abrogation) and at others call it as *tahdīd*, *takhṣīṣ* or *taqyīd*. If this is accepted, then how can the Qur'ān have the status of being the *mīzān* and the *furqān* referred to above?

These are the questions which are generally posed in this regard. Following are the answers:

(1) Variant Readings

The answer to the first question is that the Qur'ān is only what is recorded in the *muṣḥaf*, and which, except for some areas of North Africa, is recited by a vast majority of the Muslim *ummah*. None else except the reading on which this Qur'ān is recited is the Qur'ān or can be presented in the capacity and status of the Qur'ān. Thus we think that this question does not even arise.

In the following paragraphs, we shall present the details of this view.

The Qur'ān says:

سَنُقَرِّئُكَ فَلَا تَنْسَى إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ إِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ الْجَهْرَ وَمَا يَخْفَى (٨٧: ٦-٧)

Soon We shall recite [all of] it to you [O Prophet!]; then you will not forget except what Allah pleases. He indeed knows what is apparent before [you] at this time, and that also which is concealed [from you]. (87:6-7)

لَا تُحَرِّكْ بِهِ لِسَانَكَ لِتَعْجَلَ بِهِ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا حِمْلَهُ وَقُرْآنَهُ فَإِذَا قَرَأْنَاهُ فَاتَّبِعْ قُرْآنَهُ ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا بَيَانَهُ (٧٥: ١٦-١٩)

[To acquire] this [Qur'ān] swiftly [O Prophet!] do not move your tongue hastily over it. Indeed, upon Us is its collection and recital. So when We have recited it, follow this recital [of Ours]. Then upon Us is to explain it [wherever need be]. (75:16-19)

25. Fakhr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn 'Umar al-Rāzī, *Al-Tafsīr al-kabīr*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-'ilmiyyah, 1421 AH), 34.

The scheme of God regarding the revelation and collection of the Qur'ān mentioned in these verses can be stated as follows:

Firstly, the Prophet (sws) has been told that the way the Qur'ān is being revealed piecemeal to him keeping in view the circumstances is the correct way of revelation; however, he should not worry about its protection and collection and arrangement. A new recital would ensue after this chronological one. At that time, if the Almighty intends to revoke something on the basis of His wisdom, He will do so and then have the Prophet (sws) read it in a manner that he will not forget any part of it and the Qur'ān will be consigned to him in its very final form which will remain protected.

Secondly, this second recital would take place once the Qur'ān has been arranged in the form of a book, and simultaneously he would be bound to follow this recital in future. He would then not be allowed to read the Qur'ān according to its previous recital.

Thirdly, it was told that if any directive needed further explanation, it would be done so at this second recital, and in this manner this book would stand completed in every way after collection and arrangement and explanation by the Almighty Himself.

It is this second and final recital of the Qur'ān which is also termed as *al-'arḍah al-akhīrah* (the final presentation). It is evident from various narratives that each year Gabriel would read out the Qur'ān revealed in that year to the Prophet (sws) during the month of Ramaḍān. In the last year, in the *al-'arḍah al-akhīrah*, he read out the Qur'ān to him twice.

Abū Hurayrah (rta) narrates:

كَانَ يُعْرَضُ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنُ كُلَّ عَامٍ مَرَّةً فَعُرِضَ عَلَيْهِ مَرَّتَيْنِ فِي الْعَامِ الَّذِي قُبِضَ فِيهِ

Each year the Qur'ān would be read out to the Prophet Muḥammad (sws) once; however, the year he died, it was read out to him twice.²⁶

The Prophet (sws) used to read the Qur'ān on this recital till he died. After him, the rightly guided caliphs, and all the Companions (rta) from among the Muhājirūn and the Anṣār would read the Qur'ān on this recital. There was no difference in this regard between them. Later, it was this recital which was called the *al-qirā'at al-'āmmah*. Abū 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 73 AH) reports:

كَانَتْ قِرَاءَةُ أَبِي بَكْرٍ وَعُمَرُ وَعُثْمَانُ وَزَيْدُ بْنُ ثَابِتٍ وَالمُهَاجِرِينَ وَالْأَنْصَارَ وَاحِدَةً كَانُوا يَقْرَءُونَ الْقِرَاءَةَ الْعَامَّةَ وَهِيَ الْقِرَاءَةُ الَّتِي قَرَأَهَا رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ عَلَى جِبْرِيلَ مَرَّتَيْنِ

26. Abū 'Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Ismā'īl al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi' al-ṣaḥīḥ*, 2nd ed. (Riyāḍ: Dār al-ṣalām, 1999), 896, (no. 4998).

في العام الذي قبض فيه وكان زيد قد شهد العرصة الأخيرة وكان يقرئ الناس بها حتى مات.

The reading of Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān and Zayd ibn Thābit and that of all the Muhājirūn and the Anṣār was the same. They would read the Qur’ān according to the *al-qirā’at al-‘āmmah*. This is the same reading which was read out twice by the Prophet (sws) to Gabriel in the year of his death. Zayd ibn Thābit²⁷ was also present in this reading [called] the *al-‘arḍah al-akhīrah*. It was this very reading that he taught the Qur’ān to people till his death.²⁸

Consequently, it is only this recital which possesses oral *tawātur* from the time of the Companions (rta) to date. Our scholars generally call it the *qirā’at* of Ḥaḍḥ (d. 180 AH) whereas it is actually *al-qirā’āt al-‘āmmah* and classical scholars, as pointed out above, actually introduce it by this name. Ibn Sīrīn narrates:

القراءة التي عُرِضَتْ عَلَى النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فِي الْعَامِ الَّذِي قُبِضَ فِيهِ هِيَ الْقِرَاءَةُ الَّتِي يَقْرَأُهَا النَّاسُ الْيَوْمَ.

The reading on which the Qur’ān was read out to the Prophet (sws) in the year of his death is the same according to which people are reading the Qur’ān today.²⁹

If the Qur’ān is deliberated upon in the light of its coherence and arrangement, internal evidence from within the Qur’ān also pronounces this very judgement. The work which has been done by the scholars of the Farāhī school of thought on the Qur’ān in recent times speaks volumes that the text of the Qur’ān does not accept the variant readings. A person can see examples of this at many instances in Iṣlāhī’s *Tadabbur-i Qur’ān*. He writes:

Differences in variant readings have also been resolved in this commentary. The conventional and *mutawātir* reading is only the one on which the Qur’ān has been written, which we have in our hands. In this reading, the interpretation of each and every word and verse of the Qur’ān is done in such a manner in the light of classical Arabic literature, coherence and parallels of the Qur’ān that no doubt remains. Consequently, I have interpreted each

27. Besides him, other Companions (rta) would certainly have been present during the *al-‘arḍah al-akhīrah*. Consequently, a narrative reported by ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās (rta) mentions that ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd (rta) was also a witness to this event. See: Abū al-Qāsim Sulaymān ibn Aḥmad al-Ṭabarānī, *Al-Mu‘jam al-kabīr*, 2nd ed., vol. 12 (Mawṣil: Maktabah al-zahrā, 1983), 103, (no. 12602).

28. Abū ‘Abdullāh Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Bahādur ibn ‘Abdullāh al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-fikr, 1980), 237.

29. Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Kamāl al-Dīn Abī Bakr ibn Muḥammad ibn Sābiq al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Baydār: Manshūrāt al-raḍī, 1343 AH), 177.

verse on the basis of this reading and can say with full confidence that if this interpretation is done on the basis of some other readings then it can only be done at the expense of sacrificing the eloquence, wisdom and meaningfulness of the Qur'ān.³⁰

Here, it is possible that the narrative on the *Seven Aḥruf* might cause some confusion to some people in this regard. The narrative reads:

عَنْ عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنِ عَبْدِ الْقَارِيِّ أَنَّهُ قَالَ سَمِعْتُ عُمَرَ بْنَ الْخَطَّابِ يَقُولُ سَمِعْتُ هِشَامَ بْنَ حَكِيمٍ بْنِ حِزَامٍ يَقْرَأُ سُورَةَ الْفُرْقَانِ عَلَى غَيْرِ مَا أَقْرَأُهَا وَكَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَقْرَأَ نَبِيَهَا فَكَذْتُ أَنْ أَعْجَلَ عَلَيْهِ ثُمَّ أَمَهَلْتُهُ حَتَّى انْصَرَفَ ثُمَّ لَبَيْتُهُ بِرِدَائِهِ فَجِئْتُ بِهِ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَقُلْتُ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ إِنِّي سَمِعْتُ هَذَا يَقْرَأُ سُورَةَ الْفُرْقَانِ عَلَى غَيْرِ مَا أَقْرَأْتُهَا فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَرْسَلَهُ ثُمَّ قَالَ أَقْرَأْ يَا هِشَامُ فَقَرَأَ الْقِرَاءَةَ الَّتِي سَمِعْتُهُ يَقْرَأُ فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ هَكَذَا أُنْزِلَتْ ثُمَّ قَالَ لِي أَقْرَأْ فَقَرَأْتُهَا فَقَالَ هَكَذَا أُنْزِلَتْ إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ أُنْزِلَ عَلَى سَبْعَةِ أَحْرَفٍ فَاقْرَءُوا مَا تَيَسَّرَ مِنْهُ

‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Abd al-Qārī narrated: “‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said before me: ‘I heard Hishām ibn Ḥakīm ibn Ḥizām reading Sūrah Furqān in a different way from the one I used to read it, and the Prophet (sws) himself had read out this *sūrah* to me. Consequently, as soon as I heard him, I wanted to get hold of him. However, I gave him respite until he had finished the prayer. Then I got hold of his cloak and dragged him to the Prophet (sws). I said to him: “I have heard this person [Hishām ibn Ḥakīm ibn Ḥizām] reading Sūrah Furqān in a different way from the one you had read it out to me.” The Prophet (sws) said: “Leave him alone [O ‘Umar].” Then he said to Hishām: “Read [it].” [‘Umar said:] “He read it out in the same way as he had done earlier.” [At this,] the Prophet (sws) said: “It was revealed thus.” Then the Prophet (sws) asked me to read it out. So I read it out. [At this], he said: “It was revealed thus; this Qur’ān has been revealed in *Seven Aḥruf*. You can read it in any of them you find easy from among them.””³¹

If the following points about this narrative are kept in contemplation, it becomes evident that it is an absolutely meaningless narrative which should not be considered of any worth in this regard:

Firstly, even though this narrative has been recorded in the basic books of Ḥadīth literature, no one in history has ever been able to offer a convincing explanation of it rendering it totally ambiguous. Al-Suyūṭī³² has recorded several

30. Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāḥī, *Tadabbur-i Qur’ān*, vol. 8, 8.

31. Abū ‘Abdullāh Mālik ibn Anas, *Al-Mu’atta’* (Peshawar: Al-Maktabah al-ḥaqqāniyah, n.d.), 130, (no. 567).

32. Al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān*, vol. 1, 165-172.

interpretations of this narrative, and then while acknowledging the untenability of each of these has confessed that this narrative should be regarded among the *mutashābihāt*, whose meaning is only known to God.

وأرجحها عندي قول من قال : إن هذا من المتشابه الذي لا يدري تأويله

And to me the best opinion in this regard is that of the people who say that this Ḥadīth is from among matters of *mutashābihāt*, the meaning of which cannot be understood.³³

Secondly, the only plausible interpretation of the word *ahruf* is that it connotes pronunciation of words³⁴ the Arabs were used to. However, in this case, the text of the Ḥadīth itself negates this meaning. It is known that both ‘Umar (rta) and Hishām (rta) belonged to the same tribe: the Quraysh. Obviously, people of the same tribe could not have had different pronunciations.

Thirdly, even if it is accepted that this difference was of pronunciation between various tribes and as a result they were allowed to read it variously, the verb *unzila* (was revealed) is very inappropriate. The Qur’ān has specified that it was revealed in the language of the Prophet’s tribe: the Quraysh (See for example: 19:97, 44:58). After this, it can be accepted that the various tribes were allowed to read it according to their own accents, but how can this be accepted that the Almighty Himself revealed the various dialects and pronunciations.

Fourthly, it is known that Hishām had accepted Islam on the day Makkah was conquered. If this Ḥadīth is accepted, it would mean that even after the conquest of Makkah senior Companions and even a close associate like ‘Umar (rta) was unaware of the fact that the Prophet (sws) secretly taught the Qur’ān in some other form and reading from the one openly heard from him and preserved in writing and in memory. Every person can realize how grave this claim is and how far reaching its effects are.

Same is the case of the narratives which record the collection of the Qur’ān in the time of the caliphs Abū Bakr (rta) and ‘Uthmān (rta). The Qur’ān specifies that it was arranged and collected in the time of the Prophet (sws) under the direct guidance of the Almighty, as has been referred to earlier. On the other hand, these narratives present an entirely different picture which is not only against the Qur’ān but also against common sense. In the six canonical books, these narratives are primarily recorded on the authority of Ibn Shihāb al-Zuhrī (d. 124 AH). Authorities of *rijāl* regard him to be guilty of *tadlīs* and *idrāj*. Besides these, if some other facets of his personality as referred to by Imām Layth ibn Sa’d (d. 175 AH) in his

33. Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Rahmān ibn Kamāl al-Dīn Abī Bakr ibn Muḥammad ibn Sābiq al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tanwīr al-ḥawālik ilā al-Mu’attā’ Imām Mālik*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-jīl, 1993), 199.

34. The actual words are: *lughāt* and *lahjāt*. There is a difference between the two. In the former the pronunciation of the word changes because of a variation in *harakāt* (eg. يُخَل and يُخِل), while in the latter the pronunciation of a word changes because of a variation in accent. (Translator)

letter to Imām Mālik (d. 179 AH) are kept in consideration, none of the narratives reported by him regarding such important issues as this is acceptable. He writes:

وكان يكون من ابن شهاب اختلاف كثير إذا لقيناه ، و إذا كاتبه بعضنا فرما كتب في الشيء الواحد على فضل رأيه وعلمه بثلاثة أنواع ينقض بعضها بعضا، ولا يشعر بالذى مضى من رأيه في ذلك الأمر، فهو الذى يدعونى إلى ترك ما أنكرت تركى إياه.

And when we would meet Ibn Shihāb, there would arise a difference of opinion in many issues. When any one of us would ask him in writing about some issue, he, in spite of being so learned, would give three very different answers, each of which would negate the other and he would not even be aware of what he had already said. It is because of this that I have left him – something which you did not like.³⁵

Such is the reality behind these narratives. Consequently, this is an absolute truth that the Qur’ān has one reading only which is found in our codices. Besides this, the readings which are found in commentaries on the Qur’ān or are read and taught in our schools of religious instruction or are even in currency in certain areas are the remnants of those malignant campaigns from which no religious discipline of the Muslims has unfortunately remained protected.

These readings may have arisen from the insistence of some on the reading on which the Qur’ān was revealed before the *al-ardah al-akhīrah* and from the forgetfulness of the narrators but later owing to the same motives which led to the fabrication of Ḥadīth, they became so rampant that at the end of the Umayyid dynasty several of them had come to prominence. It is said that Abū ‘Ubayd Qāsim ibn Sallām (d. 224 AH) selected twenty five of them in his book. The seven readings which are famous in current times were selected by Abū Bakr ibn Mujāhid (d. 324 AH) at the end of the third century *hijrah*. Thus it is generally accepted that their number cannot be ascertained but every reading is Qur’ān which has been reported through a correct chain of narration, is compatible in any way with the *maṣāḥif* prepared by ‘Uthmān (rta) and is correct from any aspect as far as the Arabic language is concerned. Some of these readings are regarded as *mutawātir*; however, a look at their chains of narration which are found in books leaves no doubt that they are *ahād* (isolate), and most of their narrators are suspect in the eyes of the *rijāl* authorities. Consequently, no scholar can even accept them as Ḥadīth, what to speak of the Qur’ān.

(2) Intentionality of the Text

The answer to the second question is that the whole argument on the intentionality of the text is dubious. In all living languages, the meanings denoted by words and expressions are all based on perpetuation (*mutawātīrāt*), and are

35. ‘Abbās ibn Muḥammad ibn Ḥātim al-Durī, *Tarīkh Yahyā ibn Ma‘īn*, vol. 2 (Beirut: Dār al-qalam, n.d.), 375.

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Variant Readings

I have written in my treatise *Mīzān*³ that the Qur'ān is what is recorded in the *muṣḥaf*, and which, except for some parts of Africa and a few other areas, is recited by a vast majority of the Muslim *ummah* without the slightest variation. A question may arise on this: even if for the sake of discussion it is accepted that the Qur'ān is only what has just been specified and the common masses only read and study it, then why is the attitude of Muslim scholars different from this? How did it happen that the scholars of Tafsīr, Ḥadīth and Fiqh from the very beginning of these disciplines accorded equal status to the multiple readings of the Qur'ān, and would give preference to one over the other on the basis of their own opinion and inclination? So much so, jurists and ḥadīth scholars of the likes of Imām Mālik (d. 179 AH) and Imām Shāfi'ī (d. 204 AH) gave preference to the reading of Nāfi' ibn Abī Nu'aym (d. 169 AH) and 'Abdullāh ibn Kathīr (d. 120 AH) respectively.

The answer to this question is that long before all these scholars, the earliest Muslim authorities had formed the opinion that though it is not essential for the common man to acquire knowledge through the *akhbār-i aḥād*, it is essential for the scholars and the select to accept them and after being satisfied about their *isnād*, there is no

3. English title: *Islam: A Comprehensive Introduction*.

difference in acquiring and adducing the knowledge gained through them and the knowledge that pervades among the common Muslims and which is being transferred from their generations to generations. Imām Shāfi‘ī writes in his celebrated treatise *Al-Risālah*:

وعلم الخاصة سنة من خبر الخاصة يعرفها العلماء ولم يكلفها غيرهم
وهي موجودة فيهم أو في بعضهم بصدق الخاص المخبر عن رَسُولِ اللَّهِ
بها وهذا اللازم لاهل العلم أن يصيروا إليه

And the knowledge of the select is the sunnah which is acquired through their reports, which the scholars know and which is not essential for the common man to know. This sunnah is present with all the scholars or with some of them from God’s Messenger (sws) through the information provided by a reliable informant and this is the knowledge which scholars must necessarily turn to.⁴

Thus after the demise of the Prophet (sws), when trustworthy narrators started to state, for example, that while a companion had read the word مَاٰلِكَ (owner) as مَلِك (king) in verse 2 of Sūrah Fātiḥah, and يَكْذِبُوْنَ in its intensive form as يُكْذِبُوْنَ in verse 10 of Sūrah Baqarah and يُرَى in its passive form in verse 12 of Sūrah Nisā’, then this was accepted in scholarly circles in the same way that the reports of his other sayings and deeds were being accepted. The reason for this was evident: if they

4. Abū ‘Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Idrīs al-Shāfi‘ī, *Al-Risālah*, 1st ed. (Beirut: Dār al-fikr, n.d.), 478.

did not accept these reports regarding the Qur'ān, they would also not have any basis to accept reports which depicted the Prophet's deductions, verdicts, explanations and exemplary character except if they were deemed to be against a Qur'ānic verse. The proliferation of variant readings took place because of this opinion of the *tābi'ūn* (followers of the companions). Not much later, among the experts of readings which were being produced, some became prominent who were not merely adept in various modes of pronunciation of the Arabian dialect like *izhār*, *ikhfā'*, *idghām*, *imālah*, *tafkhīm*, *ishmām* and *itmām* etc but took a step ahead and by giving preference to one reading of the Qur'ān over the other as found in various reports of the knowledge of the select ('*ilm al-khāṣah*) referred to above compiled their specific set of readings that became famous by the names of these experts. This was much like the jurisprudence of Imām Mālik, Imām Shāfi'ī and other leading jurists becoming famous by their names. For this very reason, these experts of Qur'ānic readings are called "Readers invested with Preference" (*aṣḥāb al-ikhtiyār*). The result of this was and should have been that the students turn to them to learn their preference and choice of readings just as they turned to the jurists and Ḥadīth scholars to learn jurisprudence and Ḥadīth respectively. Moreover, many a time, it happened that these readers having preference adopted an intellectual centre of those times like Makkah, Madīnah, Kūfah, Baṣrah and Syria besides others as their abode. The result was that such was the fame that a preferential reading acquired among the scholars and readers of an

area that it came to be said that the people of that area followed his reading. The word “people” here referred to the scholars and readers only and not to the common masses. The masses never accept or reject such things in this way. It is precisely for this reason that the situation changed and men of learning of a particular area after some time adopted the preferential reading of some other reader. And it is for this reason that except for these learning centres, no other reading is found anywhere in the Muslim world nor is there any historical evidence of such acceptance or rejection of a reading. The only exception to this is Qīrwān where Qāḍī ‘Abdullāh ibn Ṭālib who in the later part of the third century hijrah passed the order that people should only be taught the reading of Nāfi‘.⁵ Thus, after this, common Muslims as well were forced to read the Qur’ān on the reading of Nāfi‘ in Qīrawān and in some other areas which were under its influence. The reason for this probably was that these people were the followers of Imām Mālik’s *fiqh* and about Imām Mālik, it has been pointed out above that he would generally prefer the reading of Nāfi‘.

Similar was the case with some small settlements which came under the influence of scholars. These settlements were very few in number and even exist today at some places. All other areas except these were never influenced by these changes nor did the scholars tried to influence them. Both carried on with their own ways. Thus the tradition of benefitting from variant

5. Abū al-Faḍl Qāḍī ‘Iyāḍ ibn Mūsā, *Tartīb al-madārik wa tartīb al-masālik li ma’rifah a’lām madhhab Mālik*, 1st ed., vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-kutub al-‘ilmiyyah, 1998), 483.

readings in the disciplines of *tafsīr*, Ḥadīth, *fiqh* and others has been going on without interruption, and is still going on to a greater extent. Scholars discuss these readings in their writings, gatherings and religious seminaries, and professional readers today recite the Qur’ān on seven, ten and even more variant readings. However, everyone can see that among the common masses, there is only one Qur’ān in currency everywhere. They took it from the common companions, and in the terminology of Imām Shāfi’ī transferred it from ‘*āmmah* to ‘*āmmah* (common masses to common masses). No doubt, it is also called the *riwāyah* of Ḥafṣ (d. 180 AH) but this should not be a cause of any misconception because mere reading or intonation is one thing and reading or intonation in the accent of the Arabs in a pleasing way by giving due regard to technical subtleties like *imālah*, *tafkhīm*, *ishbā’*, *ikhṭilās-i ṣilah*, *ishmām*, *rawm*, *tarqīq* and *taghlīz* that does not alter the meaning of the discourse in any way is another thing. It is this second aspect which is acquired from the *riwāyah* of Ḥafṣ in this Qur’ān, and ascribed to him on this basis. He was taught this reading from his teacher ‘Āṣim ibn Abī al-Najūd (d. 127 AH) who in turn was a student of the celebrated follower Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 74 AH). Al-Sulamī taught its subtleties in Kūfah to various students for almost forty years. About him, Abū Bakr ibn Mujāhid (d. 324 AH), the first person to have selected the seven canonical readings, has specified that he did not teach his own preferential reading but the very one on which ‘Uthmān (rta) had striven to gather the *ummah* on. He writes:

أول من أقرأ بالكوفة القراءة التى جمع عثمان رضى الله تعالى عنه
الناس عليها أبو عبد الرحمن السلى

The first person who taught the reading in Kūfah on which ‘Uthmān had gathered the people was Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī.⁶

He is the same person who upon seeing the proliferation of various readings among people had said:

كانت قراءة أبي بكر وعمر وعثمان وزيد بن ثابت و السهاجرين والانصار
واحدة كانوا يقرءون القراءة العامة وهى القراءة التى قرأها رسول الله
صلى الله عليه وسلم على جبريل مرتين فى العام الذى قبض فيه وكان
زيد قد شهد العرضة الاخيرة وكان يقرئ الناس بها حتى مات

The reading of Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān and Zayd ibn Thābit and that of all the Muhājirūn and the Anṣār was the same. They read the Qur’ān according to the *al-qirā’at al-‘āmmah*. This is the same reading which was read out twice by the Prophet (sws) to Gabriel in the year of his death. Zayd ibn Thābit was also present in this reading [called] the *al-‘arḍah al-akhīrah*. It was this reading that he taught the Qur’ān to people till his death.⁷

6. Abū Bakr Aḥmad ibn Mūsā ibn ‘Abbās ibn Mujāhid, *Kitāb al-sab‘ah fī al-qirā’āt*, 2nd ed. (Cairo: Dār al-ma‘ārif, 1400 AH), 67.

7. Abū ‘Abdullāh Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Bahādur ibn ‘Abdullāh al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-fikr, 1980), 237.

It is this very reading that is written in our codices of the Qur'ān. Not a single bit of evidence can be furnished from history except the endeavours of 'Uthmān (rta) (d. 36 AH) and Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf (d. 94 AH) to unite all Muslims on one Qur'ān in which a scholar used his influence or a ruler or a *qāḍī* used political power to impose this Qur'ān among the Muslims, the way it was done is some West African counties with regard to the reading of Nāfi'. It was this Qur'ān which the Prophet (sws) and his successors gave currency to among the Muslims and it has remained in currency ever since. Consequently, when the readers of the Muslims were compiling their preferences in readings and when their Ḥadīth scholars were collecting the reports of '*ilm al-khāṣṣah*' and their jurists and exegetes were solving the difficulties of the Qur'ān through them, Muslims were reading this very Qur'ān in the whole world. At the end of the first century *hijrah* when they entered India, they entered while reading it and when they landed at the shores of Java, Sumatra, Malaya and other islands of the Far East at the end of the eighth century, it was this very Qur'ān which was in their hands and God willing will remain in their hands till the Day of Judgement.

Here a person can pose the question: if despite all these facts, the academic tradition of the Muslims accepted all the reports related to '*ilm al-khāṣṣah*', why has the Farāhī School adopted a different stance in this regard? Our answer is that it is not easy for any person of learning to disregard reports narrated by reliable narrators; this needs an explicit Qur'ānic directive. Thus if the true meaning of the relevant verses of Sūrah

Qiyāmah had become evident at the very beginning, Muslim scholars, jurists and exegetes would probably have adopted the same stance as the scholars of the Farāhī School. Imām Ḥamīd al-Dīn Farāhī (d. 1930 AD) has explained the true meaning of these verses.⁸ Hence, that explicit Qur’ānic directive has become available on the basis of which it can be said that even if all the narratives which depict the variant readings of the Qur’ān are correct, they have been abrogated by the reading of the *arḍah akhīrah* for the universal addressees of the Qur’ān; hence they cannot be accepted in any way whatsoever.⁹ It is a directive of the Qur’ān that after its collection and arrangement, Muslims will be bound till the Day of Judgement to read it on the reading it was read by the Almighty after this collection. No Muslim can dare deviate from this directive of the Qur’ān. It states:

لَا تُحَرِّكْ بِهِ لِسَانَكَ لِتَتَّبِعَ بِهِ. إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا جَمْعَهُ وَقُرْآنَهُ. فَإِذَا قَرَأْنَاهُ فَاتَّبِعْ. (١٨-١٦ : ٧٥)

8. Ḥamīd al-Dīn al-Farāhī, *Tafsīr nizām al-Qur’ān wa ta’wīl al-Furqān bi al-Furqān*, 1st ed. (Azamgarh: Dāi’rah ḥamīdiyyah, 2008), 226-233.

9. If a narrative recorded by al-Bukhārī is correct, then ‘Umar (rta) too on the basis of this reasoning rejected many readings of Ubayy ibn Ka’b (rta) which he would present by saying: لَا أَدْعُ شَيْئًا سَمِعْتُهُ مِنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ (I will not give up anything of the Qur’ān I have heard from God’s Messenger (sws)). See: Abū ‘Abdullāh Muḥammad ibn Ismā‘īl al-Bukhārī, *Al-Jāmi‘ al-ṣaḥīḥ*, 3rd ed., vol. 4 (Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 1987), 1628, (no. 4211).

[To acquire] this [Qur'ān] swiftly [O Prophet!] do not move your tongue hastily over it. [It will be revealed like this. Rest assured] its collection and recital is Our responsibility. So when We have recited it [at that time], follow this recital. (75:16-18)

(Translated by Dr Shehzad Saleem)

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قراءت کا اختلاف

ہم نے اپنی کتاب ”میزان“ کے مقدمہ ”اصول و مبادی“ میں لکھا ہے کہ قرآن صرف وہی ہے جو مصحف میں ثبت ہے اور جسے مغرب کے چند علاقوں کو چھوڑ کر پوری دنیا میں مسلمانوں کی عظیم اکثریت بغیر کسی ادنیٰ اختلاف کے تلاوت کر رہی ہے۔ اس پر یہ سوال کیا جاسکتا ہے کہ یہ بتیل تنزل اگر یہ مان لیا جائے کہ قرآن صرف وہی ہے اور مسلمانوں کے عوام ہمیشہ سے اُسی کو پڑھتے اور پڑھاتے رہے ہیں تو اُن کے علما کا طرز عمل اس سے مختلف کیوں ہے؟ یہ آخر کس طرح ہوا کہ تفسیر، حدیث اور فقہ کے ائمہ ان علوم کی ابتدا ہی سے قرآن کی متعدد قراءتوں کو ایک ہی درجے میں رکھ کر اُن میں سے جس کو چاہتے، اپنے ذوق و رجحان کی بنیاد پر ترجیح دیتے رہے ہیں، یہاں تک کہ امام مالک اور امام شافعی جیسے جلیل القدر فقہاء اور محدثین بھی یہ کہنے میں کوئی تردد محسوس نہیں کرتے کہ اُن میں سے ایک کے نزدیک نافع اور دوسرے کے نزدیک ابن کثیر کی قراءت مرجح ہے۔

اس سوال کا جواب یہ ہے کہ ان ائمہ سے بہت پہلے مسلمانوں کے علما کی بڑی اکثریت یہ رائے قائم کر چکی تھی کہ اخبار آحاد سے ملنے والے علم کی تحصیل عام مسلمانوں کے لیے تو بے شک ضروری نہیں ہے، لیکن اُن کے علما اور خواص کے لیے بہر حال ضروری ہے اور رسول اللہ صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم سے اُس کی نسبت پر مطمئن ہو جانے کے بعد اخذ و استدلال کے لحاظ سے اُس میں اور اُس علم میں کوئی فرق نہیں کیا جاسکتا جو مسلمانوں میں شائع و ذائع ہے اور عامہ سے عام کو منتقل ہو رہا ہے۔ امام شافعی اپنی شہرہ آفاق کتاب ”الرسالہ“ میں لکھتے ہیں:

وَعِلْمُ الْخَاصَّةِ سُنَّةٌ مِنْ خَيْرِ الْخَاصَّةِ ”اور خواص کا علم وہ سنت ہے جو انہی کی خبر سے ملتی

ہے، جس کو علما جانتے ہیں اور جس کے جاننے کا مکلف عام لوگوں کو نہیں ٹھہرایا گیا۔ یہ سنت تمام علما کے پاس یا اُن میں سے بعض کے پاس رسول اللہ صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم کی طرف سے کسی قابل اعتماد خبر دینے والے کی خبر سے موجود ہوتی ہے اور یہ وہ علم ہے جس کی طرف اہل علم کو لازماً رجوع کرنا چاہیے۔“

يعرفها العلماء، ولم يكلفها غيرهم، وهي موجودة فيهم أوفى بعضهم بصدق الخاص المنخبر عن رسول الله بها، وهذا اللازم لأهل العلم أن يصيروا إليه. (رقم ۱۳۳۰)

چنانچہ نبی صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم کے دنیا سے رخصت ہو جانے کے بعد جب بعض ثقہ لوگوں نے یہ بیان کرنا شروع کیا کہ اُنھوں نے، مثال کے طور پر، فاتحہ (۱) کی آیت ۳ میں کسی صحابی سے لفظ مَلِكْ، کو بادشاہ کے معنی میں مَلِكْ، اور بقرہ (۲) کی آیت ۱۰ میں يَكْذِبُونَ، کو ذال کی تشدید کے ساتھ يَكْذِبُونَ، اور نساء (۴) کی آیت ۱۲ میں يُوْصَىٰ، کو مبنی لفعل بھی سنا ہے تو اہل علم کے حلقوں میں اس کو اُسی طرح قبول کیا گیا، جس طرح نبی صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم کی نسبت سے دوسرے اقوال و افعال کے اخبار قبول کیے جا رہے تھے۔ اس کا سبب بھی بالکل واضح تھا۔ وہ اگر قرآن کے معاملے میں ان اخبار کو قبول نہ کرتے تو نبی صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم کے اجتہادات اور فیصلوں اور آپ کی تفہیم و تمییز اور اسوہ حسنہ سے متعلق اخبار کو قبول کرنے کے لیے بھی ان کے پاس کوئی وجہ باقی نہیں رہ سکتی تھی، الا یہ کہ کسی نص سے اس تفریق کا جواز پیش کیا جائے۔

قرآن مجید میں مختلف قراءتوں کا پُرچا علما تا بعین کی اسی راے کی بنا پر ہوا۔ پھر زیادہ عرصہ نہیں گزر رہا کہ علم قراءت کے جو ماہرین مسلمانوں میں پیدا ہو رہے تھے، اُن میں کچھ ایسے لوگ بھی نمایاں ہونے لگے جنھوں نے صرف اسی بات پر اکتفا نہیں کیا کہ اہل عرب کے لہجے اور اطہار، اخفا، ادغام، امالہ، تقیم اور اشام و اتمام وغیرہ میں اُن کے طریقوں کی رعایت سے قرآن پڑھنا سیکھ لیں، بلکہ اس سے آگے بڑھ کر قرآن سے متعلق علم الخاصۃ کے اُنھی اخبار میں سے، جن کا ذکر اوپر ہوا، بعض کو بعض پر ترجیح دے کر اُنھوں نے اپنی ایک خاص قراءت بھی مرتب کر ڈالی جو اُسی طرح اُن کے نام سے مشہور ہو گئی، جس طرح امام مالک، امام شافعی اور دوسرے ائمہ کی فقہ اُن کے نام سے مشہور ہے۔ علم قراءت کے ان ماہرین کو اسی بنا پر اصحاب اختیار کہا جاتا ہے۔ اس کا نتیجہ یہ ہوا اور یہی ہونا چاہیے تھا کہ علم کے طالب اُن کے اس اختیار کی تعلیم حاصل کرنے کے لیے اُن سے رجوع کرنے لگے، بالکل اُسی طرح، جس طرح وہ ائمہ فقہ سے اُن کی فقہ اور ائمہ حدیث سے حدیث سیکھنے کے لیے رجوع کرتے تھے۔ پھر یہی نہیں، بارہا ایسا بھی ہوا کہ اُنھوں نے یا اُن کے بعد اُن کے شاگردوں میں سے کسی نے اُس زمانے کے علمی مراکز، مثلاً مکہ، مدینہ، کوفہ، بصرہ اور دمشق وغیرہ

میں سے کسی شہر کو اپنا مستقر بنالیا تو اُس شہر کے علما اور قراء میں اُس کے اختیار کو ایسی مقبولیت حاصل ہو گئی کہ اُس کے متعلق کہا جانے لگا کہ اس شہر کے لوگ اُس کی قراءت پر ہیں۔ اس تعبیر میں لوگوں سے مراد علما اور قراء ہی تھے، اس کا عامۃ الناس سے ہرگز کوئی تعلق نہیں تھا۔ وہ اس طرح کی چیزوں کو اس طریقے سے ترک یا اختیار نہیں کرتے۔ چنانچہ یہی سبب ہے کہ یہ صورت حال تبدیل بھی ہوتی رہتی تھی اور اُسی شہر کے اہل علم کچھ عرصے کے بعد کسی دوسرے قاری کی قراءت کو اختیار کر لیتے تھے اور یہی سبب ہے کہ ان علمی مراکز سے باہر پوری مسلم دنیا میں نہ کوئی دوسری قراءت کہیں ملتی ہے اور نہ اس طرح کے کسی ترک و اختیار کے کوئی آثار کہیں دریافت کیے جاسکتے ہیں۔ اس سے مستثنیٰ صرف قیروان ہے، جہاں قاضی عبداللہ بن طالب نے تیسری صدی ہجری کے آخر میں یہ حکم جاری کر دیا کہ لوگوں کو صرف نافع کی قراءت پڑھائی جائے گی*۔ لہذا عام مسلمان بھی اس کے بعد قیروان اور اُس کے زیر اثر مغرب کے بعض علاقوں میں اسی قراءت کے مطابق قرآن پڑھنے کے لیے مجبور ہو گئے اور آج تک پڑھ رہے ہیں۔ اس حکم کا باعث غالباً یہ ہوا کہ یہ لوگ فقہ مالکی کے پیرو تھے اور امام مالک کے بارے میں ہم اوپر بیان کر چکے ہیں کہ وہ قراءت میں نافع کے اختیار کو ترجیح دیتے تھے۔

یہی معاملہ بعض چھوٹی چھوٹی بستیوں میں علما کے زیر اثر بھی ہوا۔ تاہم یہ معدودے چند مقامات تھے اور اس وقت بھی کہیں کہیں موجود ہیں۔ ان کے سوا باقی دنیا میں عام مسلمان کبھی ان تبدیلیوں سے متاثر نہیں ہوئے اور نہ علما نے انھیں متاثر کرنے کی کوشش کی۔ دونوں اپنے اپنے طریقے پر چلتے رہے۔ چنانچہ تفسیر، حدیث، فقہ اور دوسرے علوم میں قرآن کی مختلف قراءتوں سے اختلاف دے کی روایت صدیوں تک بغیر کسی انقطاع کے قائم رہی اور آج بھی بڑی حد تک قائم ہے۔ علما اپنے مباحث، تصنیفات، مجالس اور مدارس میں اس کا اظہار کرتے اور قراء حضرات آج بھی سات، دس، بلکہ اس سے بھی زیادہ قراءتوں پر قرآن کی تلاوت کا مظاہرہ کرتے رہتے ہیں۔ لیکن ہر شخص دیکھ سکتا ہے کہ عام مسلمانوں میں شائع و ذائع قرآن ایک ہی ہے۔ انھوں نے اسے عامہ صحابہ سے لیا تھا اور امام شافعی کی تعبیر کے مطابق نسل بعد نسل عامہ سے عامہ کو منتقل کر رہے ہیں۔ اس میں شبہ نہیں کہ اسے حفص کی روایت بھی کہا جاتا ہے، مگر اس سے کوئی غلط فہمی نہیں ہونی چاہیے، اس لیے کہ ایک چیز حفص قراءت ہے اور ایک اُس میں اہل عرب کے لہجے کی فنی نزاکتوں، مثلاً امالہ، تخم، اشباع، اختلاس، صلہ، اشمام، روم اور ترقیق و تغلیظ وغیرہ کی رعایت سے حسن ادا کا اہتمام، جس سے کلام کے مدعا میں کوئی فرق واقع نہیں ہوتا۔ اس قرآن میں یہی دوسری چیز ہے جو حفص کی روایت سے اخذ کی جاتی ہے اور اسی بنا پر اسے اُن سے منسوب بھی کیا جاتا ہے۔ انھوں نے اس کی تعلیم اپنے استاد عام

* ترتیب المدارک، قاضی عیاض بن موسیٰ ۱/۲۸۳۔

سے حاصل کی تھی اور عاصم اس فن میں جلیل القدر تابعی ابو عبد الرحمن السلمي کے شاگرد تھے جو کم و بیش چالیس برس تک کوفہ میں اس کی یہ فی نزا کتیں طلبہ کو سکھاتے رہے۔ اُن کے بارے میں سبع قراءات کے اولین مرتب ابو بکر بن مجاہد نے تصریح کر دی ہے کہ وہ اپنا کوئی اختیار نہیں، بلکہ وہی قراءات پڑھاتے تھے جس پر سیدنا عثمان رضی اللہ عنہ نے لوگوں کو جمع کرنے کی سعی کی تھی۔ اُس نے لکھا ہے:

”سب سے پہلے جس نے کوفہ میں اُس قراءت کی
عثمان رضی اللہ تعالیٰ عنہ الناس علیہا
جمع کیا تھا، وہ ابو عبد الرحمن السلمي ہی تھے۔“
أول من أقرأ بالكوفة القراءة التي جمع
عثمان رضی اللہ تعالیٰ عنہ الناس علیہا
أبو عبد الرحمن السلمي.

(السبعة فی القراءات، ابو بکر بن مجاہد/۶۷)

یہ وہی بزرگ ہیں جنہوں نے مختلف قراءتوں کا شیوع دیکھ کر لوگوں کی تنبیہ کے لیے فرمایا تھا:

كانت قراءة أبي بكر وعمر وعثمان
وزيد بن ثابت والمهاجرين والأنصار
واحدة، كانوا يقرؤون القراءة العامة، وهي
القراءة التي قرأها رسول الله صلى الله عليه
وسلم على جبريل مرتين في العام الذي قبض
فيه، وكان زيد قد شهد العرضة الأخيرة،
وكان يقرئ الناس بها حتى مات.
”ابو بکر و عمر، عثمان، زید بن ثابت اور تمام مہاجرین و
انصار کی قراءات ایک ہی تھی۔ وہ قراءات عامہ کے
مطابق قرآن کی تلاوت کرتے تھے۔ یہ وہی قراءت
ہے جس پر رسول اللہ صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم نے اپنی وفات
کے سال جبریل امین کو دومرتبہ قرآن سنایا۔ عرضہ اخیرہ
کی اس قراءت میں زید بن ثابت بھی موجود تھے۔
دنیا سے رخصت ہونے تک وہ لوگوں کو اسی کے مطابق
قرآن پڑھاتے رہے۔“
(البرہان، الزرکشی/۳۳۱)

یہی قراءت اس وقت ہمارے مصاحف میں ثبت ہے۔ تاریخ کے اوراق سے کوئی ادنیٰ شہادت بھی پیش نہیں کی جاسکتی کہ تمام مسلمانوں کو ایک قرآن پراکٹھا کرنے کے لیے سیدنا عثمان رضی اللہ عنہ اور جابر بن یوسف کی مساعی کے بعد اس کو کسی عالم نے اپنے اثرو سوخ یا کسی حاکم یا قاضی نے ریاست کی طاقت سے کبھی مسلمانوں کے اندر رائج کرنے کی کوشش کی ہو، جس طرح کہ مغرب میں نافع کی قراءات کے معاملے میں کی گئی۔ عرضہ اخیرہ کے بعد اسے رسول اللہ صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم نے اور آپ کے بعد آپ کے جانشینوں نے رائج کیا اور یہ اُسی طرح رائج ہے۔ چنانچہ مسلمانوں کے قرا جب اپنے مختارات ترتیب دے رہے تھے اور اُن کے محدثین جب ’علم الخاصہ‘ کے اخبار جمع کر رہے تھے اور اُن کے فقہاء اور مفسرین جب اُن کی مدد سے قرآن کی مشکلات حل کر رہے تھے، اُس وقت بھی وہ پوری

دنیا میں اسی کی تلاوت کر رہے تھے۔ پہلی صدی ہجری کے آخر میں وہ ہندوستان میں داخل ہوئے تو اسی کی تلاوت کرتے ہوئے داخل ہوئے اور آٹھویں صدی کے اواخر میں جب جاوا، سماٹرا، ملایا اور مشرق بعید کے دوسرے جزائر کے ساحلوں پر اترے تو اُس وقت بھی اُن کے ہاتھوں میں یہی قرآن تھا اور خدا نے چاہا تو قیامت تک یہی رہے گا۔ یہاں کوئی شخص یہ سوال کر سکتا ہے کہ مسلمانوں کے علم نے اگر ان سب حقائق کے باوجود علم الخاصۃ کے اخبار کو اس باب میں قبول کیے رکھا ہے تو مدرسہ فرائی کے اہل علم کا رویہ اس سے مختلف کیوں ہے؟ ہمارا جواب یہ ہے کہ ثقافت کے اخبار کو رد کرنا کسی صاحب علم کے لیے آسان نہیں ہے، اس کے لیے نص چاہیے تھی۔ چنانچہ اس مسئلے سے متعلق سورہ قیامہ کی آیتوں کا صحیح مفہوم اگر ابتدا ہی میں واضح ہو جاتا تو مسلمانوں کے علما اور فقہاء اور مفسرین بھی غالباً وہی کرتے جو مدرسہ فرائی کے اہل علم کر رہے ہیں۔ امام حمید الدین فرائی نے ان آیتوں کا صحیح مفہوم واضح کر دیا ہے، لہذا وہ نص میسر ہو گئی ہے جس کے اعتماد پر اب کہا جاسکتا ہے کہ قرآن کی قراءت سے متعلق تمام اخبار اگر صحیح بھی ہوں تو قرآن کے اہل مخاطبین کے لیے عرضہ اخیرہ کی قراءت کے منسوخ کر دیے گئے ہیں، اس لیے کسی طرح قابل قبول نہیں ہو سکتے۔ قرآن کا حکم ہے کہ جمع و ترتیب کے بعد اس کی جو قراءت اللہ تعالیٰ کی طرف سے کی جائے گی، مسلمان قیامت تک اُسی کی پیروی کریں گے اور کوئی مسلمان قرآن کے اس حکم سے انحراف کی جسارت نہیں کر سکتا۔ ارشاد فرمایا ہے:

وَلَا تَحْرِكْ بِهِ لِسَانَكَ لِتُجْعَلَ بِهِ، اِنْ عَلَيْنَا جَمْعُهُ وَقُرْآنَهُ، فَاِذَا قُرْآنُهُ فَاتَّبِعْ قُرْآنَهُ.

(القیامہ ۷۵: ۱۶-۱۸)

”تم اس (قرآن) کو جلد پالینے کے لیے اپنی زبان کو اس پر نہ چلاؤ۔ (یہ اسی طرح اترے گا۔ تم مطمئن

رہو)، اس کا جمع کرنا اور سنانا، سب ہماری ذمہ داری ہے۔ اس لیے جب (اُس وقت) ہم اس کو پڑھیں تو

اس کی اُس قراءت کی پیروی کرو۔“

[۲۰۱۴ء]

* بخاری کی روایت اگر صحیح ہے تو سیدنا عمر رضی اللہ عنہ نے بھی حضرت ابی بن کعب کی بہت سی قراءتوں کو اسی استدلال سے رد کر دیا تھا، جنہیں وہ یہ کہہ کر پیش کر رہے تھے کہ لا اَدْعُ شَيْئًا سَمِعْتُهُ مِنْ رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ، ”میں قرآن کی کوئی چیز نہیں چھوڑوں گا جو میں نے رسول اللہ صلی اللہ علیہ وسلم سے سنی ہے“ (رقم ۴۳۸۱)۔

Common Misconceptions about

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which is this great Qur'ān. (15:87)⁷

ii. The Qur'ān has Variant Readings

It is alleged that the Qur'ān has variant readings. Typically a verse may have more than one variation. These variations are not merely in pronunciation, they exist, for example, in addition or deletions of words, in the singular and plural form of words, in declensions and in verb structures.⁸ It is generally believed that these variations have been divinely revealed. The first person to record these readings in the form of a book was Abū 'Ubayd Qāsim ibn Sallām (d. 224 AH). He recorded twenty five readings; Abū Ja'far al-Tabarī (d. 310 AH) recorded over twenty readings, while it was Abū Bakr ibn Mujāhid (d. 324 AH) who selected the seven famous ones.⁹ These seven readings became famous through their readers. They are:

Place	Reader
1. Madīnah	Nāfi' (d. 169 AH)
2. Makkah	Ibn Kathīr (d. 120 AH)

7. For an explanation of this verse see: Amīn Aḥsan Iṣlāhī, *Tadabbur-i Qur'ān*, vol. 4, 377-378.

8. For a compendium of such examples, see: Muḥammad Fahad Khārūf, *Al-Muyassar fī al-qirā'āt al-arba' 'asharah*, 4th ed., Beirut: Dār Ibn Kathīr, 2006.

9. For further details, see: Abū al-Khayr Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Jazarī, *Al-Nashr fī al-qirā'āt al-'ashr*, vol. 1 (Egypt: Maktabah al-tujjāriyyah, n.d.), 33-35.

3. Damascus	Ibn 'Āmir (d. 118 AH)
4. Baṣrah	Abū 'Amr (d. 154 AH)
5. Kūfah	'Āṣim (d. 127 AH)
6. Kūfah	Ḥamzah (d. 156 AH)
7. Kūfah	Kisā'ī (189 AH)

These readings cannot be accepted in any manner as having the same status as the Qur'ān because of the following reasons.

(i) There exists a consensus of opinion among the scholars of our *ummah* on the fact that the Qur'ān is *mutawātir* (ie such a large number of people have transmitted the Qur'ān that the existence of any error in the transmitted text is impossible).

Now, if the chains of narrators of each of these variant readings are examined, none of them can be claimed as *mutawātir*. They may be *mutawātir* from their famous originators but they are certainly not *mutawātir* all the way from these originators up to the Prophet (sww). At best, they can be classified as *aḥād* (isolate reports). Thus al-Zarkashī writes:

القراءات السبع متواترة عند الجمهور وقيل مشهورة... والتحقيق أنها متواترة عن الأئمة السبعة أمّا تواترها عن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم ففيه نظر فإنّ إسناده الأئمة السبعة بهذه القراءات موجود في كتب القراءات وهي نقل الواحد عن الواحد لم تكمل شروط التواتر في استواء الطرفين والواسطة : وهذا شيء موجود في كتبهم.

The opinion of the majority is that these seven

readings are *mutawātir*. However, one opinion is that they are *mashhūr*¹⁰ The truth in this regard is that they are *mutawātir* from these seven [*qurrā'*]. As far as their *tawātur* from the Prophet (sws) is concerned, this is debatable. For the chains of narrators of these seven are found in the books of *qirā'āt*. These chains are transmission from a single person to another and do not fulfil the condition of *tawātur* neither from the first narrator to the last nor in between.¹¹

(ii) Not only are these readings isolate reports (*aḥād*), but also many of the narrators of these readings are not regarded as trustworthy by the scholars of '*ilm al-rijāl*' as far as accepting Aḥādīth from them is concerned. As an example, this is what is written about Ḥafṣ ibn Sulaymān, perhaps the most famous and most widely acclaimed of all the disciples of the major *qurrā'*:

In the opinion of 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Abī Ḥātim, 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Yūsuf ibn Khirash and Imām Muslim he is *matrūk al-ḥadīth* (abandoned in Ḥadīth). Al-Bukhārī comments on him as *tarakūhu*. 'Alī ibn al-Madīnī and Abū Zur'ah regard him to be *da'īf al-ḥadīth* (weak in Ḥadīth). In the opinion of Yahyā ibn Ma'īn as quoted by Abū Qudāmah Sarakhṣī and 'Uthmān ibn Sa'īd al-Dārimī he is *laysa bi thiqaḥ* (not reliable). Al-Nasā'ī also regards him to

10. ie. widely attested.

11. Abū 'Abdullāh Badr al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Bahādur ibn 'Abdullāh al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān fī 'ulūm al-Qur'ān*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Beirut: Dār al-fikr, 1980), 319.

be *laysa bi thiqaḥ*. Šālīḥ ibn Muḥammad al-Baghdādī says that the Aḥādīth narrated by him are not worth writing as primary evidence and all of them mention unfamiliar things in religion. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Yūsuf ibn Khirāsh says that he is a great liar and forges Āḥādīth. Yaḥyā ibn Ma‘īn also regards him to be a great liar.¹²

It seems quite strange that a person so widely regarded as unreliable (even called a liar) in accepting Ḥadīth from be regarded as a very dependable person as far the Qur’ān is concerned.

(iii) The only complete reading of the Qur’ān which is in vogue from the time of the Prophet (sws) is the *al-qirā‘āt al-‘āmmah* (the universal reading) – the very reading read out to the Prophet (sws) once the revelation of the Qur’ān had been completed. It was this very reading which existed among the companions of the Prophet (sws). Abū ‘Abd al-Raḥman al-Sulamī (d. 105 AH)¹³ narrates:

قال أبو عبد الرحمن السلمي : كانت قراءة أبي بكر وعمر و عثمان
و زيد بن ثابت و المهاجرين والأنصار واحدة كانوا يقرعون القراءة
العامة وهى القراءة التى قرأها رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم على

12. See: Abū al-Ḥajjāj Yūsuf ibn al-Zakī al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl fī asmā’ al-rijāl*, 2nd ed., vol. 7 (Beirut: Mu’assasah al-risālah, 1413 AH), 13-15.

13. See: Al-Mizzī, *Tahdhīb al-kamāl*, vol. 14, 410.

جبريل مرتين في العام الذى قبض فيه¹⁴ وكان زيد قد شهد العرصة الأخيرة وكان يقرئ الناس بها حتى مات.

The reading of Abū Bakr, ‘Umar, ‘Uthmān and Zayd ibn Thābit and that of all the Muhājirūn and the Anṣār was one. They would read the Qur’ān according to the *al-qirā’āt al-‘ammah*. This is the same reading which was read out to the Prophet (sws) in the year of his death by Gabriel. Zayd ibn Thābit was also present in this reading [called] the *al-‘ardah al-akhīrah*¹⁴ and it was this very reading that he taught the Qur’ān to people till his death.¹⁵

As far as certain countries are concerned where the Qur’ān is practically read on a different reading,¹⁶ these readings are bound to have been enforced in them in a certain period of time much later after the departure of the Prophet (sws). Thus, for example, it is historically known that the reading of Nāfi was officially promulgated in the third century *hijrah* in North Africa after the rise of the Malikite *fiqh* in this area.¹⁷

14. ie. the final recital.

15. Al-Zarkashī, *Al-Burhān*, vol. 1, 237.

16. Thus for example, the Qur’ān is read on the reading of Qālūn (d. 220 AH), a student of Nāfi’ (d. 169 AH), in Tunisia and on the reading of Warsh (d. 197 AH), another student of Nāfi’, in Morocco. Similarly, the Qur’ān is read on the reading of Dūrī (d. 246 AH), a student of Abū ‘Amr (d. 154 AH), in parts of Sudan and Yemen.

17. For details see: Hind Shalbī, *Al-Qirā’āt bi Afriqiyyah*, 1st ed. (Tunisia: Al-Dār al-‘arabiyyah li al-kitāb, 1983), 223-235.

It is clear from this analysis that these extant readings which are found in books of *tafsīr* and read and taught in religious schools can in no way be accepted. Whether they originated from insistence by some to cling to the first recital of the Qur'ān, or were mere explanations of the actual verses written down by the companions in their own codices or were concocted to disparage the Qur'ān is a mystery which perhaps may never be solved. However, this much is certain. They cannot be regarded as the Qur'ān in any way.

iii. The Qur'ān was revealed on Seven *Aḥruf*

There are certain narratives which say that the Qur'ān was revealed on seven *aḥruf*. A typical narrative reads:

حَدَّثَنِي يَحْيَى عَنْ مَالِكٍ عَنْ ابْنِ شَهَابٍ عَنْ عُرْوَةَ بْنِ الزُّبَيْرِ عَنْ
عَبْدِ الرَّحْمَنِ بْنِ عَبْدِ الْقَارِيِّ أَنَّهُ قَالَ سَمِعْتُ عُمَرَ بْنَ الْخَطَّابِ
يَقُولُ سَمِعْتُ هِشَامَ بْنَ حَكِيمٍ بْنِ حِزَامٍ يَقْرَأُ سُورَةَ الْفُرْقَانِ عَلَى
غَيْرِ مَا أَقْرَأُهَا وَكَانَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَقْرَأَ نَبِيَهَا
فَكَذْتُ أَنْ أَعْجَلَ عَلَيْهِ ثُمَّ أَمَهَلْتُهُ حَتَّى انْصَرَفَ ثُمَّ لَبَّيْتُهُ بِرِدَائِهِ
فَجِئْتُ بِهِ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَقُلْتُ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ
إِنِّي سَمِعْتُ هَذَا يَقْرَأُ سُورَةَ الْفُرْقَانِ عَلَى غَيْرِ مَا أَقْرَأْتَنِيهَا فَقَالَ
رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ أَرْسَلُهُ ثُمَّ قَالَ اقْرَأْ يَا هِشَامُ فَقَرَأَ
الْقِرَاءَةَ الَّتِي سَمِعْتُهُ يَقْرَأُ فَقَالَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ

هَكَذَا أُنْزِلَتْ ثُمَّ قَالَ لِي اقْرَأْ فَقَرَأْتُهَا فَقَالَ هَكَذَا أُنْزِلَتْ إِنَّ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ أُنْزِلَ عَلَى سَبْعَةِ أَحْرُفٍ فَاقْرَءُوا مَا تَيَسَّرَ مِنْهُ

‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn ‘Abd al-Qārī narrated: “‘Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said before me: ‘I heard Hishām ibn Ḥakīm ibn Ḥizām reading Sūrah Furqān in a different way from the one I used to read it, and the Prophet (sws) himself had read out this *sūrah* to me. Consequently, as soon as I heard him, I wanted to get hold of him. However, I gave him respite until he had finished the prayer. Then I got hold of his cloak and dragged him to the Prophet (sws). I said to him: “I have heard this person [Hishām ibn Ḥakīm ibn Ḥizām] reading Sūrah Furqān in a different way from the one you had read it out to me.” The Prophet (sws) said: “Leave him alone [O ‘Umar].” Then he said to Hishām: “Read [it].” [‘Umar said:] “He read it out in the same way as he had done before me.” [At this,] the Prophet (sws) said: “It was revealed thus.” Then the Prophet (sws) asked me to read it out. So I read it out. [At this], he said: “It was revealed thus; this Qur’ān has been revealed on *Seven Aḥruf*. You can read it in any of them you find easy from among them.” ’ ’ ’¹⁸

While critically analyzing this narrative, Ghāmidī writes:¹⁹

18. Mālik ibn Anas, *Al-Mu’attā*, vol. 1 (Egypt: Dār ihyā’ al-turāth al-‘arabī, n.d.), 201, (no. 473).

19. Ghāmidī, *Mīzān*, 30-31.

If the following points about this narrative are contemplated on, it becomes evident that it is an absolutely meaningless narrative which should not be considered of any worth in this regard:

Firstly, even though this narrative has been recorded in the basic books of Ḥadīth literature, no one in history has ever been able to offer a convincing explanation of it rendering it totally ambiguous. Al-Suyūṭī²⁰ has recorded about forty interpretations of this narrative and then, while acknowledging the weakness of each of these, has confessed that this narrative should be regarded among the *mutashābihāt*, whose meaning is only known to God:

وأرجحها عندي قول من قال : إن هذا من المتشابه الذي لا يدري تأويله

And to me the best opinion in this regard is that of the people who say that this Ḥadīth is from among matters of *mutashābihāt*, the meaning of which cannot be understood.²¹

Secondly, the only plausible interpretation of the

20. Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Kamāl al-Dīn Abī Bakr ibn Muḥammad ibn Sābiq al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Al-Itqān fī ‘ulūm al-Qur’ān*, 2nd ed., vol. 1 (Baydār: Manshūrāt al-radī, 1343 AH), 165-172.

21. Jalāl al-Dīn ‘Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Kamāl al-Dīn Abī Bakr ibn Muḥammad ibn Sābiq al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī, *Tanwīr al-hawālik*, 2nd ed. (Beirut: Dār al-jīl, 1993), 199.

word *ahruf* is that it connotes pronunciation²² of words the Arabs were used to. However, in this case, the text of the Ḥadīth itself negates this meaning. It is known that both ‘Umar (rta) and Ḥishām (rta) belonged to the same tribe: the Quraysh. Obviously, people of the same tribe could not have had different pronunciations.

Thirdly, even if it is accepted that this difference was of pronunciation between various tribes and as a result they were allowed to read it variously, the verb *unzila* (was revealed) is very inappropriate. The Qur’ān has specified that it was revealed in the language of the Prophet’s tribe: the Quraysh (See for example: 19:97, 44:58). After this, it can be accepted that the various tribes were allowed to read it according to their own accents, but how can it be accepted that the Almighty Himself revealed the various dialects and pronunciations.

Fourthly, it is known that Ḥishām had accepted Islam on the day Makkah was conquered. If this Ḥadīth is accepted, it would mean that even after the conquest of Makkah senior Companions and even a close associate like ‘Umar (rta) was unaware of the fact that the Prophet (sws) secretly taught the Qur’ān in some

22. The actual words are: *lughāt* and *lahjāt*. There is a difference between the two. In the former the pronunciation of the word changes because of a variation in *harakāt* (eg. بُخِلَ and بَخِلَ), while in the latter the pronunciation of a word changes because of a variation in accent. (Translator’s Note)

other form and reading from the one openly heard from the Prophet (sws) and preserved in writing and in memory. Every person can realize how grave this claim is and how far reaching are its effects.

iv. Only God knows the Meanings of Certain Qur'ānic Verses

It is generally thought that there are certain verses of the Qur'ān whose meaning is only known to God and that no man is able to understand them. They are called the *mutashābihāt* verses of the Qur'ān.

It needs to be clarified that the *mutashābihāt* of the Qur'ān are verses in which things that are beyond human observation or comprehension are mentioned in the form of comparison (*tashbīh*) to things which we know in our own language and through our own experience. The actual purport conveyed by these verses is clear. However, human intellect is not equipped to grasp the reality to which they refer. For example, it is said in Sūrah Ḥāqqah that the Almighty's throne shall be lifted by eight angels on the Day of Judgement. Now we cannot know what the throne will be like, though we may have a slight idea since the word throne is also a common word in our language. Similarly, Sūrah Muddaththir says that there will be nineteen sentinels guarding Hell. Again we cannot say why there will be nineteen and what they will be like, though we know that the word nineteen mentions a definite number. Consequently, verses which mention
